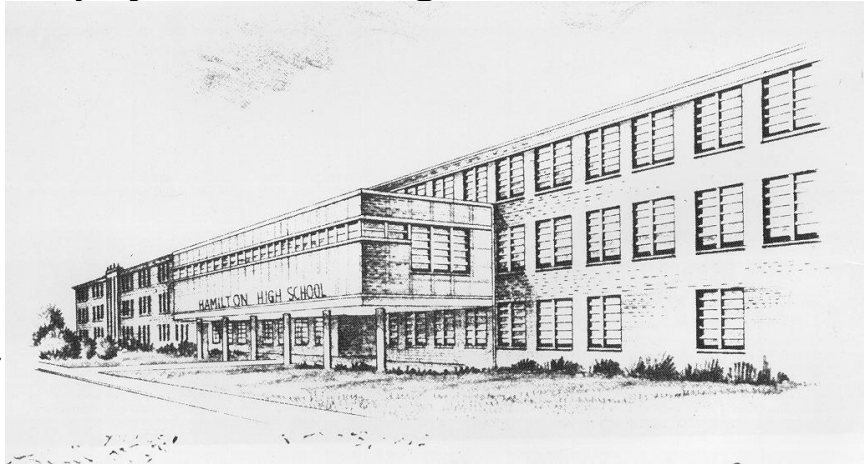


The History of Hamilton High School

The origin of Hamilton may be traced to the original Greenwood School which was located on the corner of Melrose and Walker Avenue. Greenwood was the pride of the community it served. The thousands of students who attended Greenwood are today the proud parents and grandparents of a large number of the students presently enrolled in Hamilton High School.



Increasing enrollment precipitated a need for improved conditions, better facilities, and a larger, more modern building to accompany the emerging technological aspect of education. In 1940-41, a plot of land at Kerr and Wilson Street was purchased by the city Board of Education. On that land, a new school was built. The school was named Hamilton Junior High School. It opened under the administration of J. L. Buckner, the first principal of Hamilton.

Hamilton was named in memory of Principal Green Polonius Hamilton, who had taught and influenced thousands of students in his long career, and was nationally noted as an educator, poet, musician, and the first principal of the first, and for many years the only, high school for Blacks in the city of Memphis. In 1943, Superintendent E. C. Ball made a recommendation to the Board of Education that Hamilton become a four year high school. The recommendation was approved and the first senior high school graduation was held in June, 1945.

Rapidly increasing enrollment necessitated an expansion in facilities and curriculum. In 1950, an addition, which included an auditorium and vocational shops, was made to the original building. On Wednesday, March 15, 1958, a new gymnasium was dedicated. From 1958 to 1968, under the principalship of Harry T. Cash, Hamilton's enrollment reached 3,299 students, grades seven through twelve, and the faculty increased to 137 teachers.

During the 1968-69 school year, the Memphis Board of Education awarded a building contract to McFarland Associates Architects for the erection of the new Hamilton High School. Accepting the recommendation from the administration,

faculty and community, the Board of Education classified Hamilton High School as a comprehensive high school to serve adequately the diversities in interest and abilities of the student body. On December 7, 1972, the new Hamilton High School became a reality, and the faculty and students moved into the facilities under the administration of Oliver J. Johnson.

The facilities were structured to accommodate large group instruction, small group discussion, independent study and team teaching. Available for student use are resource centers, a media center and career opportunities in auto mechanics, cosmetology, dry cleaning, mechanical drawing and woodworking. At the same time, the curricular offerings include courses which are preparatory for college bound students. Advanced placement programs in English, mathematics, social studies and science give students the opportunity to gain college credit for work accomplished during their senior year.

The Hamilton auditorium has a seating capacity of 2,000, yet its facilities are flexible enough to accommodate groups as small as 200 in a close setting. Hamilton High School presently has the largest use of the school by community groups of any school in Memphis City Schools. The school adjoins the beautiful and historic Lincoln Park. The school houses a community center with a gymnasium and craft area. The school's gymnasium has a seating capacity of 3,500.

In September, 1973, the Hamilton student body was integrated for the first time, in compliance with the court order, and implemented through busing under the Memphis City School's Plan Z. The new Hamilton High School has an environment conducive to maximum achievement for all students. From 1972 to 1977, Hamilton operated under a specially designed rotating schedule that accommodated an Experienced Based Career Education Program funded by the federal government and the State Board of Education. This experience proved to be a giant progressive step in the educational experiences for the Hamilton community. The program was designed to expose secondary school children to a large range of career choices before students select a career specialization area of training.

In 1982, Hamilton was chosen as a pilot school for the Governor's program for career emphasis and placement of selected high school seniors with little likelihood of pursuing further education or obtaining jobs without assistance. The participants were taught vital job skills for obtaining and maintaining employment. The pilot program was so successful that the program is now included in many other schools within the system.

Also in 1982, the Ford Foundation recognized the staff and student body for outstanding programs during the preceding decade. The student body was presented a \$1,000 award of appreciation and the staff was invited to participate in a grant proposal for a \$1,000 award and possibly a \$20,000 competitive award. Memphis City Schools instituted a partnership with the community in the Adopt-A-School Program begun in 1987. First Tennessee Bank and Delta Boule' adopted Hamilton High School. Members of these institutions serve as role models, contribute to the selection of Career Day consultants, and presents trophies and plaques to deserving students at Commencement ceremonies. These adopters visit the school and also become positive public relations spokesmen to enhance the community's positive perspective of education which increases the number of positive votes for funds for education.

The Kellogg Company's personnel coordinator, Jake Mickens, a Hamilton graduate, operates a Junior Achievement Program in cooperation with the economics teachers at Hamilton.

Hamilton's Alumni Association, spearheaded by a retired Hamilton High teacher, Rev. William Suggs, established a W. A. Suggs Scholarship Fund. This organization hosts an annual Alumni banquet to generate funds from donations given by decades of alumni for scholarships for deserving Hamilton graduates. The banquet is highly successful, and is the vehicle by which many students, who are financially unable to attend college, are given an opportunity to attend the college of their choice.

Hamilton presents an annual Academic and Athletic banquet, which is successfully supported by the Hamilton community and alumni through financial donations. The banquet recognizes a large percentage of academically and athletically talented students for their skills.

A Basketball Boosters Club was established several years ago. Faculty members, community members, corporations and students pay a membership fee to join the club. The funds are used to purchase additional equipment and to award incentives to deserving athletes.

First Tennessee bank selected Hamilton to receive \$1,500 for books through Most Books for Kids, a program sponsored by more than four hundred banks, savings and loans, and credit unions to provide additional books for selected schools in America. Over two thousand titles from which to choose were given to the librarian by Random House.

Hamilton was selected as the site for the city-wide Assessment Program to assess all junior high students with learning problems in Memphis City Schools and return them to the Board of Education to be placed in appropriate learning disciplines.

The excellent background afforded students by implementation of curricula described throughout the self-study has yielded a reservoir of highly committed individuals who have achieved far beyond their imagination. Hamilton's alumni may be identified prominently not only locally, but also in all regions of the country, whether it be in the areas of health, business, education, politics, social science, entertainment, religion, law or athletics.

Included in the list of those who have achieved excellence are just a few of recent incidence: Willard Pugh, Hollywood actor whose starring role in A Color Purple led to an Academy Award nomination; Dr. Armstead Robinson, professor of history at the University of Virginia, was named Distinguished Yale Alumnus, the youngest and the first black recipient of this prestigious award; Dr. Karen Wilson, sociologist and Ford Foundation Research Fellow at the University of Texas, who recently was awarded a \$40,000 grant to study the impact of integration on academic excellence in the seventies; Dr. Deborah Harmon, Hines professor of anatomy at Meharry Medical College, was elected to two terms as president of Union of Black Episcopalians; Dr. Julie Saville, professor of history at San Diego University, was awarded a Ph.D. with Distinction at Yale University; Dr. Shellie White Means, professor of economics at Cornell University; Lowell Smith is a veteran performer with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company of New York and Hollywood; Angles Echols, Broadway actress and theater performer; Burnetta B. Williams, manager of Global Debt Financing, Global Finance Department, Federal Express Debt, portfolio is over \$2 billion; late and longtime principal of Hamilton High School, Oliver Johnson, and former Hamilton assistant principals Paul Thacker and Denise Johnson are Hamilton graduates; and the late Lula Hedgeman, Walt Disney's Teacher of the Year, who was choral director at Overton High School.

The list of distinguished graduates is so astonishing that the school's marketing coordinator instituted a tracking project to collect data from alumni to be displayed at Hamilton as an incentive for present Hamilton students to aspire to excel. The Historical Perspective Room, located in the front lobby, houses an impressive number of success stories.